DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 403 631 EA 027 852

TITLE	Responses to a Harvard Study on School Choice: Is It a Study at All? Dialogue Series, Number 9.
INSTITUTION	Pioneer Inst. for Public Policy Research, Boston, MA.
PUB DATE	Nov 95
NOTE	14p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research, 85 Devonshire St., 8th Floor, Boston, MA 02109 (single copies free).
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Collected Works - Conference Proceedings (021) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Access to Education; *Competition; Elementary Secondary Education; *Equal Education; *Free Enterprise System; Parent Attitudes; Program Effectiveness; Racial Segregation; *Research Problems; *School Choice; Social Stratification

ABSTRACT

A draft of a book, "School Choice: The Cultural Logic of Families, the Political Rationality of Institutions," received a great deal of media attention. The book contains research from nine different studies of school choice and includes an introduction and conclusion by Harvard professors Richard Elmore, Gary Orfield, and Bruce Fuller. The research found that despite the popularity of school choice, children in choicé schools do not appear to learn at a higher rate than those who remain in neighborhood schools. In addition, choice plans often result in inequities. Pioneer Institute invited nine school-choice advocates to respond to the book's findings; this publication contains excerpts of their comments. The participants included Chester Finn, Howard Fuller, Charles Glenn, Paul Hill, Peggy Hunter, Susan Mitchell, Terry Moe, Joe Nathan, and Mary Anne Raywid. The participants argue that the manuscript is not a true study but a policy statement, has an antichoice bias, does not represent all school-choice programs, and is methodologically flawed. They also argue that a well-structured choice program does not lead to social inequality. A box inset contains excerpts of a critique made by Paul Peterson, Director of the Center for American Political Studies at Harvard, of Dr. John Witte's evaluation of the Milwaukee choice program. (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

AUG 2 6 1996

Pioneer Institute
for Public Policy Research

ED 403 631

Responses to a Harvard Study on School Choice: Is It a Study at All?

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
R. Chatfield
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Number 9
November 1995

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

EA 027 852

AUG 2 6 1996

Pioneer Institute
for Public Policy Research

Dialogue

Responses to a Harvard Study on School Choice: Is It a Study at All?

A draft of a book entitled School Choice: The Cultural Logic of Families, the Political Rationality of Institutions, *soon to be published by Teachers College Press, is receiving a lot of attention in newspapers and in education circles due to a widely distributed Harvard press release. The book contains research from nine different reports on school choice and includes an introduction and conclusion by Harvard professors Richard Elmore, Gary Orfield, and Bruce Fuller. In the wake of headlines such as "School Choice Programs Threaten to Segregate Schools with No Improvement in Student Achievement" and "School Choice is Not the Answer," Pioneer Institute has gathered responses to the manuscript draft in order to shed some light on the implications of the book. Several experts in the field of education shared their comments with us:*

- **Chester Finn,** *Hudson Institute, Washington, D.C.*
- **Howard Fuller,** *Marquette University, former Superintendent of Milwaukee Public Schools*
- **Charles Glenn,** *chairman, Educational Administration and Policy Studies, Boston University*
- **Paul Hill,** *research professor, Institute for Public Policy and Management, Seattle, Washington*
- **Peggy Hunter,** *president, Charter School Strategies, Inc., Minneapolis, Minnesota*
- **Susan Mitchell,** *senior fellow, Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, and President, The Mitchell Company, Inc.*
- **Terry Moe,** *senior fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University*
- **Joe Nathan,** *director, Center for School Change, Hubert Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota*
- **Mary Anne Raywid,** *professor, Hofstra University*

Number 9
November 1995

85 Devonshire Street, Boston, MA 02109 • 617-723-2277 Fax: 617-723-1880

Pioneer Institute: *What were your impressions after reading the brief released by the editors and subsequent press coverage of the upcoming Harvard book on school choice?*

Howard Fuller: To characterize the book as a study is to invent a new definition of the term. It is not a study. The editors put together a group of people who oppose choice and organized a conference around it.

Chester Finn: The brief put out on the Harvard book leads me to believe that the book is a reprehensible piece of work. Two of the editors, Richard Elmore and Gary Orfield, are long-time opponents of choice. They take every opportunity to dispel the notion that people can make decisions for themselves. They suggest that only the experts have the knowledge to make educational decisions. Further, their selection of contributing authors is proof of the bias that exists in this work.

Surely these authors cannot contend that a well-designed choice program will bring more separation than now exists. As long as we operate with neighborhood-based enrollments, the present separation will inevitably continue. Certainly forced busing has not proven a satisfactory solution. What else have these editors to recommend?

—Mary Anne Raywid

Pioneer Institute: *After reading the draft of the manuscript, how do you believe this book will contribute to our understanding of the issues surrounding choice?*

Mary Anne Raywid: This is, in effect, a policy statement by three Harvard professors. It is not for the scholarly audience, as the title and auspices might suggest. The manuscript now circulating is flawed on two counts: it is biased and, given its policy orientation, it reaches unfair conclusions about equity.

First, the matter of bias. The papers in this collection are not the only studies that have been done of the choice programs in these areas and, in at least some cases, the other authors have reached very different conclusions.

The second warning concerns the claim that choice will lead to racial, class, and cultural separation. A well-structured choice program need not do so—as, indeed, some of the authors of this collection make plain. Surely these authors cannot contend that a well-designed choice program will bring more separation than now exists. As long as we operate with neighborhood-based enrollments, the present separation will inevitably continue. Certainly forced busing has not proven a satisfactory solution. What else have these editors to recommend?

Joe Nathan: I was particularly surprised by the claims that choice programs are young and untested. These statements are simply not true. Minneapolis-St. Paul has had choice programs for 25 years and Cambridge, Massachusetts has had them for 20 years. East Harlem has had choice for 15 years, and alternative public schools have operated since the late 1960s. These documents totally ignore alternative public schools like Central Park East, St. Paul's Open Schools, the Parkway School in Philadelphia, the Metro School in Chicago, and others. Some of these schools have distinguished records of teaching inner city students for over 20 years.

Critics argue that a relatively small percentage of Minnesota students opt for school choice. In fact,

Just because you assemble people from different backgrounds and races in one school does not mean that they go to school together. There is at least an equal possibility that letting people choose their schools provides greater opportunities for those who are least well served now.

—Paul Hill

more than 113,000 (14 percent) of Minnesota's K-12 students actively selected their schools during the 1992-93 school year. Another example of choice are independent schools, which have been thriving for 75 years.

No one in Minnesota suggests that these plans have solved all the state's problems. Advocates have seen choice as but one aspect of the comprehensive change that needs to take place in our schools.

I should add that public opinion has shifted dramatically in Minnesota. In 1985, 35 percent of those surveyed favored choice and 65 percent opposed it. In 1991, after people saw the gains from choice, 76 percent were in favor, with only 21 percent opposed.

Paul Hill: The collection of studies is not a good representation of the school choice issue. It probably comes reasonably close to representing what programs are in place currently, except that it leaves out charter schools, the single biggest choice program currently operating. In addition, I think the book mistakenly avoids the essential choice issues, such as expanding choice to include private schools and the choices that are created inside public schools.

The introductory chapter raises a polemic. The editors set up a dichotomy whereby if the state loosens up organizational constraints on schools and reduces the scope of bureaucracy, it is also abandoning the goals of fairness and equity. That polemic ignores the tremendous evidence that school systems based on compulsion are neither fair nor equitable. Just because you assemble people from different backgrounds and races in one school does not mean that they go to school together. There is at least an equal possibility that letting people choose their schools provides greater opportunities for those who are least well served now.

Charles Glenn: This Harvard piece is merely a collection of essays going in different directions. The editors made an odd choice of contributing writers. They must have been looking for works that confirmed their preconceived notions.

In their introduction, the editors are guilty of what they themselves say should not be done. They assume that choice schemes are all the same and make

The book is relatively narrow, particularly with regard to the editors' conclusions. It is disappointing that the conclusions appear to be more negative than the data justify. The editors approached the issues with an anti-choice bias.

—Peggy Hunter

the astonishing mistake of identifying school segregation in the South with choice. The strategy was obviously to make choice look guilty by association. This strategy was allegedly evenhanded, when in fact it was anything but.

Pioneer Institute: *Do you have any comments regarding the methods employed by the researchers?*

Susan Mitchell: What struck me in the summary and the introduction was that the editors appeared to be basing the conclusions about choice on desegregation programs. The comparison is really unfair and misleading for a variety of reasons. They assume that the attributes of these types of desegregation programs apply to other choice programs and they simply do not. Having done research on these desegregation programs, we found the application of findings about public school choice to private school choice programs to be an utter mismatch.

Right now, poor kids are trapped in our worst schools. Perhaps the most important feature of choice is that it empowers those kids to seek out better opportunities. Unfortunately, people who want to work within the existing system are dooming them. It is easy to say that choice is not equitable and point to ways in which poor kids have not done well. Instead, we should compare educational choice to the system we currently have, which is grossly inequitable.

—Terry Moe

Terry Moe: The important thing to mention in this respect is that choice programs have been designed in very different ways and, in most cases, have contained restrictions that make it very difficult for markets to work effectively. In each case, an effort has been made to simply integrate choice programs into the existing school system. Why would we think that by introducing a few elements of choice, but maintaining all the basic structural components of the existing system and the same political controls, education would somehow be transformed and revolutionized in these districts and states?

I would not expect major changes since these programs were never designed to allow choice to work well. Political opposition accounts for most of these restrictions; the advocates of the existing system do not want this kind of change. In the real world, we find a host of restrictions inherent in the existing system mixed together with elements of choice. If you really want to know how choice operates, these elements have to be part of the study as well. There has to be a very careful appreciation of how the restrictions affect the operation of choice.

One positive development is that we now have a large number of private voucher systems that give children from low-income families funds to attend private schools. These programs have fewer restrictions and are good examples of what happens when kids have the option of leaving the public sector to move into the private sector. Studies of those situations are just getting under way.

Peggy Hunter: The book is relatively narrow, particularly with regard to the editors' conclusions. It is disappointing that the conclusions appear to be more negative than the data justify. The editors approached the issues with an anti-choice bias.

Paul Hill: The best case for studying the potential of choice programs is to look at everything that has happened since the option of private schools became legal. But to determine the potential of choice by looking at the puny attempts in the public sector is to miss the point. As an evaluation of choice, this book is deficient in two ways. First, it places the entire burden of proof on any proposal to change the current system. Second, it defines the scope of research so narrowly that it eliminates the most important instances of choice.

In one chapter of the Harvard book, Dr. John Witte evaluates the Milwaukee school choice program. Paul Peterson, Director of the Center for American Political Studies at Harvard, has published a critique of Witte's work. The following excerpts are from the critique:

The evaluation of the Milwaukee school choice program by John Witte and his co-investigators is biased against finding choice schools effective. Their comparison of choice schools with Milwaukee public schools is methodologically flawed in numerous respects. Many findings are based on procedures that fail to comply with basic principles of evaluation research. Even at its best, the evaluation fails to control for parental education, occupation, income, welfare dependency, single parent household, students' native language, whether a student has severe social problems and the social composition of the school. Yet information provided within the evaluation indicates that many of these factors placed choice students at an educational disadvantage.

The evaluation also misrepresents the "attrition problem" in the choice schools. Reanalysis of the data from the evaluation reveals that choice schools, far from having an attrition problem have done much to mitigate turnover rates in elementary schools. Elementary students in choice schools are only one tenth as likely to leave a school during the school year as are low income elementary students in public schools. They are also 50 per cent more likely to be in the same school a full year later than are low income elementary students.

The most direct, consumer-based measures of school performance in the Witte analysis indicate that choice schools are much more likely to satisfy parents than are public schools. But even if we accept Witte's findings on student achievement, and conclude that choice schools are no more effective than public schools, we are still left with the undeniable fact that choice schools achieve similar results at less than one half the cost.

There is a lot more choice out there than people recognize. The editors focus only on programs that are officially called trials of choice, and they compare these programs to an idealized version of the existing public school system—one that is able to integrate all groups successfully and serve everyone fairly. The real choice options are much broader than the editors acknowledge, including charter schools, choices that parents create for themselves inside the public system, and choices that the public system creates to satisfy parent demands. Choice is such a powerful motive that the current system is forced to create it in many places, quite apart from formal "choice experiments." The current system is also much less fair and equitable than the editors assume. Intensely active parents get the best teachers and most resources for their children, all operating under the cover of a supposedly fair and objective public system. The current system creates schools that are themselves fractionalized as a result of parent pressure for special programs. On the other hand, choice schools do not necessarily push people apart. The

The authors assume that those who choose to stay in their neighborhood schools in the midst of a choice system are not exercising choice, or are not choosing well. They keep implying that less-informed parents will be unable to make good decisions for their children when there is no evidence for that. If there is any kind of racist and classist assumption in this dialogue, that is it.

—Paul Hill

editors make these assumptions without explaining why.

Charles Glenn: The editors use a typical strategy, setting up a straw man and then knocking him down. I disliked the tone that was used to make the opponents look ridiculous and trivial. Let me quote from the first chapter: "Shaking off the shackles of bureaucratic assumptions, these earnest policy-crafters dash outdoors into the sunshine, joyfully announcing bold new reforms aimed at improving local schools or the family." I also think that their sneer referring to the "magical benefits" attributed to choice was ridiculous and insulting. Clearly choice cannot take the place of other things that need to be done in education.

Pioneer Institute: *What do you believe constitute effective evaluations of school choice programs?*

Terry Moe: Although there is a lot of emphasis on academic achievement, that is and always has been the hardest thing to demonstrate. I do not think it will happen overnight and you cannot expect it to be easily shown.

Test scores are pretty crude measures of success; other parameters matter as well. Many families are looking for a better moral climate, stronger discipline, safer schools, and more individual attention for their children. These things do not necessarily show up in test scores. For these reasons, it is very important to pay attention to parental satisfaction.

Susan Mitchell: A major theory behind school choice is that markets work better than monopolies. We have already seen the pressure that interest in the expanded choice program is putting on Milwaukee Public Schools. The new superintendent has said that the pressure is causing them to accelerate change. Certainly, change in the existing schools as a response to parental choices is one positive indicator.

If you had to pick a single indicator to judge whether schools are working, it would probably be the graduation rate. The private high schools that are now part of the expanded choice program graduate more than 90 percent of their students, compared to the Milwaukee public high schools, which graduate approximately 40 percent of their freshmen. The private schools also operate at roughly half the cost. So any remotely economic comparison, in terms of benefits to students or taxpayers, favors the voucher program.

Paul Hill: Parent satisfaction and student effort are valid signs of success. Once parents choose their child's school, they are more committed to it. Parents view the school as an opportunity, and consequently they often urge their kids to work harder. Accumulation of credits, amount of homework done, parental satisfaction with the school, awareness of what school is doing for the kid—all of these factors matter. The subtleties of choice imply that it improves the bond between the family and the school, which is not easily quantified.

Student achievement scores are important, but they have to be used carefully and comparisons must be fair. One of the chapters in the book is written by John Witte who was hired by the State of Wisconsin to study the effects of the Milwaukee extended choice program on student achievement. In his study, Witte makes the mistake of comparing a greatly disadvantaged group with a more advantaged group. That is not a fair comparison.

Pioneer Institute: *Does the book provide a comprehensive overview of choice programs?*

Terry Moe: There is no mention in this draft of the successful programs in East Harlem, Cambridge, or Montclair, New Jersey. This is not a survey of existing choice programs. As you go chapter by chapter, you do not get a panoramic view of how choice operates in the United States.

Paul Hill: Almost any study that looked closely enough at the dynamics of individual parent choice and individual school operation fell out of the purview of this book. The studies considered only macro results, not individual schools.

Charles Glenn: I thought it a glaring omission that the editors did not examine Cambridge, a district that is right under their noses. They discuss extensively the problems associated with parents who do not choose, but do not go on to describe what has happened in Cambridge and 15 other Massachusetts cities, where the program requires that *all* parents choose a school. It was odd that they did not have anyone write on Massachusetts, where 25 percent of public school pupils go to school under choice policies. The fact that they limited their analyses to programs where only some parents make choices was a major mistake. They would have been much better off studying environments where choice is universal. The problem is that the nature of bureaucratic organizations produces inequitable effects when choice is just an option, not a requirement.

Pioneer Institute: *Do any of the specific chapters merit particular attention?*

Terry Moe: Valerie Lee's work lays out survey data demonstrating that black inner-city residents are strong supporters of choice. She then reports that this is unfortunate, since it would have negative consequences for them. The only data she has show that poor people support choice, yet the highlight of her chapter is a negative assessment of how it would affect them. In the end, the data are incidental to her argument.

The editors of this book do not recognize that if choice were universal, they would get away from the situation where only the rich are able to choose. The only way to guarantee equity and justice is to let everyone choose without financial penalties.

—Charles Glenn

Amy Stuart Wells interviews St. Louis parents whose children are taking part in a choice program. The fact that people have some reservations about taking advantage of choice does not provide us with any insight on what an equilibrium would look like 10 years from now if a serious choice system were adopted. In the first few years after such a program was adopted, you would most likely witness a small number of people opting for change. Gradually, more would participate as the world began to look different and as schools began to change.

Joe Nathan: Amy Stuart Wells also interviewed kids in St. Louis, but not the over 200,000 students who have participated in choice programs in Minnesota.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Mary Anne Raywid: In another publication, Bruce Fuller, one of the Harvard editors, summarized the findings from three of the manuscripts in the following ways:

- "[They] dispel the notion that low-income parents will not actively choose alternative schools."
- "Students do appear to learn at a higher rate than similar students who remain in their neighborhood school."
- "Parents' responses to their...choice program are consistently positive."
- "Choice schools are doing something right—possessing features that spark higher parental satisfaction with their child's school."
- "Parents also feel school principals and teachers are more accessible."
- "Magnet schools with a distinct identity and enthusiastic teachers can attract a diverse range of families and children."
- "In Detroit...the strongest support for school choice options comes from inner city black parents."

Were policy makers to follow the advice of the editors of this manuscript, it would mean that the up to 2 million youngsters now in public schools of choice would be returned to schools that do not offer the benefits the editors themselves listed.

Terry Moe: I too would like to comment on Witte's study in Milwaukee. Because John Witte controls all the data, no one can check his conclusions. No one can reanalyze them or collect new data on the Milwaukee Public Schools because the information is classified. How are we to make progress in learning about that program except through Witte? It is a pathetic situation from a social science standpoint and a very unusual one indeed.

Susan Mitchell: The stunning thing about Witte's research is that his conclusions do not match his findings. His findings are extraordinarily positive, and if those were findings within an urban public school system, everyone would be jumping up and down. Parents are highly satisfied, the program does not skim the best students, the kids in the Milwaukee voucher program are lower income than their low-income peers, they are academically behind their low-income peers, and they tend to have more behavioral problems than the kids in the public schools. These data fly in the face of the myth that choice skims the best kids. One of the most interesting findings in Witte's report is that parents become more involved when they choose these schools. The program has kids who were failing in the public school system, yet they get into an effective school, with strong leadership and autonomy, and the parents become more engaged.

Witte's work is paraded as proof that choice does not work, when in fact the only negative conclusion he reaches (that choice produces no increase in academic achievement) is highly suspect. The positive conclusions are not highlighted.

Pioneer Institute: *Do you agree with the book's conclusion that choice increases inequities?*

Terry Moe: The editors say that choice does not work very well and that it leads to inequities. However,

the equity problems that are associated with choice are due to design elements that are unique to each program and can be changed.

Right now, poor kids are trapped in our worst schools. Perhaps the most important feature of choice is that it empowers those kids to seek out better opportunities. Unfortunately, people who want to work within the existing system are dooming them. It is easy to say that choice is not equitable and point to ways in which poor kids have not done well. Instead, we should compare educational choice to the system we currently have, which is grossly inequitable.

Mary Anne Raywid: The policy recommendations made by the editors are in effect a proposal to level down in the name of equity. Unless we want to clamp a permanent lid on positive change in schools, we had better start understanding equity as a demand for improving the success rate of disadvantaged youngsters—whether or not we can manage it for all of them at the same time and at the same rate. My concern is to save what has proven to be many inner-city students' best hope.

Joe Nathan: Some observers of school choice insist that the programs primarily benefit students who are already doing well in school. However, thousands of young Minnesotans used the state's "Second Chance" cross-district choice laws to come back to school after having dropped out. One study of 300 inner-city dropouts who used this law to enroll in school again found that, one year after they had reentered school, 61 percent were either still in school or had graduated. Young people from low-income families are well represented among those who exercised choice. Indeed, students from low-income families and from communities of color are over-represented. It should also be noted that these students reported dramatic increases in aspirations after they were allowed to change schools.

Paul Hill: The authors assume that those who choose to stay in their neighborhood schools in the midst of a choice system are not exercising choice, or are not choosing well. They keep implying that less-informed parents will be unable to make good decisions for their children when there is no evidence for that. If there is any kind of racist and classist assumption in this dialogue, that is it.

Charles Glenn: The conclusions contain four assertions, one of which is that choice is likely to increase segregation. This was a very crucial charge and is the basis for much of the press attention the manuscript has received. I found it unfortunate that the editors did not use any of my work (or other sources) to examine this issue more carefully.

The effects of the choice program on racial separation are determined by the choice design, but are neither unique to choice, nor necessarily implied in the choice concept. My work has shown that parents are currently making private choices that may increase race and class separation, but that government can counter this through appropriate incentives. For instance, METCO, the Cambridge choice program, and magnet schools do not increase separation.

The editors fail to frame this issue appropriately. They are not acknowledging the major theory that when people start functioning as customers, the providers of the services have to pay more attention to them and that improves quality.

—Peggy Hunter

The editors of this book do not recognize that if choice were universal, they would get away from the situation where only the rich are able to choose. The

only way to guarantee equity and justice is to let everyone choose without financial penalties.

Susan Mitchell: The authors ignore evidence that in Milwaukee's private school choice program, exactly the opposite is true. Most eligible students are in the poorest and most racially segregated areas of Wisconsin. Academically, they are among the lowest achieving in the state. This information is documented in a comprehensive study directed by former Milwaukee Public School Superintendent Howard Fuller and Sammis White, Ph.D., an urban planning professor at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

I found a number of the research chapters to be useful. But the editors of the volume seem to justify their position against choice on the basis of controlling the minds of future generations—the government should be the source for the advancement of the country's thought process. I disagree with this.

—Charles Glenn

Pioneer Institute: *How would you respond to the overall conclusions drawn by the editors in the book?*

Terry Moe: The editors simply interpret the literature in light of their opinions. In my view, the important conclusion is that design is important and that by changing the design you can affect the equity component. In the end, the editors do not acknowledge that we could design choice systems that would in fact give poor people enormously better opportunities and improve schools without these equity problems. They fail to realize that the problems stem from design and we should focus our energy on setting up a design that allows markets to work.

Peggy Hunter: What I found most disappointing was that the editors do not use the information they collected constructively. For example, when they find that not all families are making choices, they claim choice does not work. There is no consideration of the forces in the traditional system that thwart families from taking advantage of the opportunities available through choice. There is no attempt to use what they learned to improve choice. There is an assumption that the current system is the desired standard and is providing what low-income and minority families need and choice does not and cannot. The authors do not accept the positive findings as information that might be of benefit to traditional education systems. Their report does not help move the improvement of American education along.

Susan Mitchell: The editors fail to frame this issue appropriately. They are not acknowledging the major theory that when people start functioning as customers, the providers of the services have to pay more attention to them and that improves quality.

Charles Glenn: I found a number of the research chapters to be useful. But the editors of the volume seem to justify their position against choice on the basis of controlling the minds of future generations—the government should be the source for the advancement of the country's thought process. I disagree with this.

They also conclude that choice is unlikely by itself to increase the variety of programs available. But they fail to mention that choice is one step in a larger process that creates an environment for change and puts pressure on schools to change. That is exactly what we found in Cambridge: leaders in schools were given the freedom to change and do innovative things, and they did.

The conclusion claims that for choice programs to have any promise they must find a way to get more non-choosers to participate. I respond by saying, "wake up and smell the coffee—we already have a way of doing this." Cambridge is an operating example of a "way of engaging a large proportion of parents." You simply cannot send your children to school in Cambridge or 15 other Massachusetts cities without selecting a school. And parents are happy to choose. ✪

Pioneer Institute has published several pieces on school choice. In 1991, we published Abigail Thernstrom's book, School Choice in Massachusetts. *The following year, choice was one of the ideas Steven F. Wilson advanced in his book,* Reinventing the Schools: A Radical Plan for Boston. Agenda for Leadership, *published in 1994, includes a chapter entitled "Standards, Charter Schools, and Choice," by Carol D'Amico and Michael P. Garber. We again looked at choice in our June 1995* Dialogue, *"School Choice: A Marketplace for Education."*

For information on purchasing any of the books, or to receive a copy of the Dialogue, *contact Gabriela Mrad or Charlie Chieppo at (617) 723-2277.*

Pioneer Institute *Dialogues* are a series of publications that offer perspectives on specific policy issues. *Dialogues* are the reproduced remarks of speakers and participants at Pioneer conferences, forums, and roundtables, and are published with their permission. Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of Pioneer Institute or as an attempt on its behalf to aid or hinder the passage of any legislation.

Responses to a Harvard Study on School Choice: Is It a Study at All?

Pioneer Institute
for Public Policy Research

Dialogue

Pioneer Institute
for Public Policy Research
85 Devonshire Street, 8th Floor
Boston, MA 02109

FIRST CLASS MAIL
US POSTAGE
PAID
Boston, MA 02109
Permit No. 51378